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AUTHOR Burchby, Marcia; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This guide, written by Marcia Burchby, Ralph Martin, and George Wood, for improving relations between teachers and parents emphasizes that the onus of bringing about better relations and clearer lines of communication falls upon the teacher. In the first part, six key questions offer guidelines for introspective examination on the part of the teacher. These concern not only the teacher's evaluation of current methods of communications with parents but also reflections on the feelings and attitudes of parents and the general attitude of the school administration toward parent-school relationships. Several findings from the 1982 "14th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools" are presented as an aid for clarifying this evaluative thinking. The second section contains suggestions for improved communications: (1) building a year-long plan; (2) helpful hints for successful parent conferences; (3) communication samples; (4) things to send home besides homework; (5) communicating via a student notebook; and (6) writing communications carefully with proper grammar and spelling. Teachers' ideas and comments are included, as well as a bibliography on parent teacher communications. (JD)

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Parent-Teacher Relations:
A Self-Help Guide To Improved Communications

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Developed By:

Marcia Burchby
Ralph Martin
George Wood

College of Education
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701

SP 021 150

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Section I

Introduction: Parent-Teacher Communications

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Introduction

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Introduction:

How many times had it happened? The note in the mail box letting Fred know a parent had called. Then, when he returned the call there was the usual chill on the conversation as the parent of one of his students demanded to know why Steve had come home with a "D" in Social Studies? "Why hadn't I been notified?" demanded Steve's mother.

Fred, a fourth year teacher in Metro knew all too well why he hadn't notified Steve's parents. It wasn't that he didn't want to, it was just that he had become wary of talking to parents. That single act had caused too much turmoil in this life - like the shouting match he was baited into with a parent in last year's parent/teacher conferences; the lack of response he got when he tried to contact parents of children who were discipline problems; and the irate notes students brought back with their signed report cards. How could it be different; how could Fred build a more constructive and fruitful relationship with the parents of his students?

It was well worth the effort. Fred knew that when parents become partners in the educational process discipline problems decrease and learning increases. So whatever it took to change the rut he was in Fred vowed to work this year to improve parental relations. But how? And where to start?

Sitting down with pen in hand Fred began to think through a series of questions that would help him solve this problem. We'd like to share these questions with you.

1. What is it about my communications with parents that concerns me? Can I be specific about what particular ways I feel I am not effectively communicating?

2. How do I currently communicate with parents? What types of things do I tell them about their child and about the educational program we are carrying out?
3. How does the school district communicate with parents and the public? What messages are we sending to the public about what is going on in their schools?
4. How do the parents of my students feel about visiting my class or me? Do they share with me some of my misgivings about parent/teacher communication?
5. How do parents feel about the schools in general? What do they think is going on here and how does that affect their communications with me?
6. How much do I really want to communicate with parents? In fact, how involved do I want them in the educational processes in my classroom and school?

Fred realized that his questions referred to public relations which, like it or not, every school has, and, the key to building good public relations is good communications.

Fred hoped he would be able to lay a foundation for improving his parent communications by examining parent relations through his questions. In what follows we have provided space for you to explore these questions yourself. Perhaps you would like to improve your relations with parents by improving communications. Or perhaps you already are successful in communicating with parents and want to build on that success. Whichever, we hope that by answering these questions you will gain insight into <u>your</u> own needs when it comes to communicating with parents. In addition,

we have included particular strategies for strengthening parent/teacher relations through improved communications.

Hopefully this material will prove useful. If you have questions or would like to share with us specific tactics you use in strengthening ties with your students' parents pelase feel free to call or write us:

Ralph Martin
252 McCracken
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701
614 594-5493

or

George Wood
372 McCracken
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701
614 594-6865

Six Key Questions For Improved Parent-Teacher Relations:

Question 1: What is it about my communications with parents that concerns me? Can I be specific about particular ways I feel I am not effectively communicating with paren..?

(This should be a "brainstorming" activity. The object is not to try to find blame or fault when looking at your communication breakdowns. Rather, focus on specific problems you think you have had or are having in communicating with parents. It might also be helpful to think of problems the district at large has in communicating positively with parents. But start on a positive note - think of one example of successful communications with a parent and then list ways in which other communications have not lived up to that experience.)

A. An example of positive communication (be specific - student, date focus, outcome, type of expressions used).

B. Current concerns (again, it is important to be specific - student, parent, particular frustrations).

C. District concerns (in what specific ways does the district have a problem communicating positively with parents).

Question 2: How do I currently communicate with parents? What do I tell them about their children and the educational program?

A. Start by listing every piece of paper you send home. (Some examples: report cards, assignments, notes, announcements, etc.)

B. Now examine that list. What have you told parents about you and your class? Is the tone primarily academic, evaluative, critical of student behavior? What communication approaches did you try? Check your parent relations by asking yourself these questions:

1. Did I try something new over previous approaches?
2. Did I exert special effort in trying to communicate with parents of any disadvantaged students?
3. Did I try to make my written messages more personal and informal?
4. Did I try using the telephone to reach parents who seldom attend school events?

5. Did I try new approaches when parents visited my classroom, e.g., tapes, slides, overlays?

6. Did I take pictures of special class projects and offer them to school/local newspapers?

7. Did I try to find out what went wrong and what I could do better when a communication with a parent seemed less successful than hoped?

8. Did I give my principal at least one news story each month?

9. Did I avoid "educationese" when writing or talking to parents?

10. Did I try to include successes or positive behaviors when I reported problems to parents?

C. Reflect on the items in letter B. Have you honestly been able to check all those you wanted? Now go back and circle those you didn't check but would have liked to. Refer to this list in choosing items for your use in Section II.

Question 3: How does the school district communicate with pa[illegible] and the public? What messages are we sending to th[illegible] public about what is going on in their schools?

A. List all the ways your district communicates with residents in the district. (Newsletters, bulletins, etc.).

B. Get copies of each of the above. Now analyze them closely: How well are they written; do they suggest specific ways in which parents can add to the district; what topics do they cover?

If you were the parent, would you spend time reading this? If your answer to the last question is "no" what would you change? (List below and send in to whomever does your newsletter or district annual report.)

Question 4: How do the parents of my students feel about visiting my class or me. Do they share with me some of my misgivings about parent/teacher communication? If so, what are the misgivings?

A. If you are a parent, list those feelings that you have had, or do have, about meeting with your child's teacher (for example: anxious, relaxed, caucious, etc.).

Look back over that list - do you think the parents of your students share those feelings? Remember this when you begin to select suggestions from Section II.

B. Remember, one of the best predictors of success in school is a student's socioeconomic status (SES). Quite often the students who are having the most problems in school - the students whose parents you often want to see - are students whose families make up the lower SES brackets. With that in mind, we might further assume that these parents did not find school a particularly successful experience themselves. When these parents think about schools, how do you imagine their past school experiences affect the following:

1. Their view of teachers and principals?

2. Their perception of a school's function?

3. Their enthusiasm or support for a school's programs, curriculum, budget?

4. How do they view special school services, school discipline, student vandalism, mismanagement of schools and funds, etc.

Remember: One of the main keys in building good parent communications is to empathetically understand how parents feel about you and schools. If we get defensive all possibility for good/positive communication is lost. Look back over the above lists - remember this in choosing your own strategies.

Question 5: How do parents feel about the schools in general?

What do they think is going on here and how does

that affect their communication with me?

Following are several of the findings from the 1982 "14th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools."[1]

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1. Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, September 1982.

Table 1

What do you think are the biggest problems with which the *public* schools in this community must deal?

	National Totals %	No Children In School %	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Lack of discipline	27	27	26	25
Lack of proper financial support	22	21	26	18
Use of drugs	20	20	20	19
Poor curriculum/poor standards	11	13	11	12
Difficulty getting good teachers	10	9	11	8
Teachers' lack of interest	7	6	9	10

Table 2

Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the *public* schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here — A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

Ratings Given The Public Schools	National Totals								
	1982 %	1981 %	1980 %	1979 %	1978 %	1977 %	1976 %	1975 %	*1974 %
A rating	8	9	10	8	9	11	13	13	18
B rating	29	27	25	26	27	26	29	30	30
C rating	33	34	29	30	30	28	28	28	21
D rating	14	13	12	11	11	11	10	9	8
FAIL	5	7	6	7	8	5	6	7	5
Don't know	11	10	18	18	15	19	14	13	20

Table 3

In determining America's strength in the future — say, 25 years from now — how important do you feel each of the following factors will be — very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important?

National Totals

	Very Important %	Fairly Important %	Not Too Important %	Not At All Important %	Don't Know %
1. Developing the best educational system in the world	84	13	1	*	2
2. Developing the most efficient industrial production system in the world	66	26	3	1	4
3. Building the strongest military force in the world	47	37	11	2	3

*Less than one-half of 1%.

Table 4

And what is the main thing that *you* like about it [the school he/she attends]?

	Public School Parents %	Nonpublic School Parents %
Quality of education	13	25
Teachers' interest	11	14
Curriculum	11	8
Children are learning	10	11
Qualified teachers	10	5
Faculty are nice	7	3
Location	7	5
Parents kept informed	4	7
Discipline	4	20
Teacher/child relationship	3	6

There are several conclusions we can draw from these results:

1. The public is less-and-less satisfied with their schools (Table 2).

2. However, they are still very supportive of public education and would be in favor of stronger financial support (Table 1). In fact, another result of the survey, saw the public rating developing "the best education system in the world" over industrial and military development when it came to a secure American future (Table 3).

3. Parents, while they are supportive of increasing aid to schools, do not feel they are well informed about what is going on in schools (Table 4).

These results show us that while there are problems in terms of the public's support for schools there is still a positive level of public interest in building a strong educational system. Positive, purposeful, and well planned parent communications can develop better relations with parents by involving them in school practices. Strong parent involvement helps to develop a broader base of public interest which is likely to result in increased public support for schools.[2]

There is a great deal each of us can do to improve relations with parents. But . . . .

Question 6: How much do I really want to communicate with parents? In fact, how involved do I want my students' parents in the educational processes of my classroom?

1. As far as you are concerned, which of the following statements best describes the type of communications you would like to have with parents? (Circle as many as are applicable.)

   A. I only want to talk with parents when I have problems with their child.

---

2. You could replicate the Gallup survey by using the PACE materials available through Phi Delta Kappa. For more information contact Wilmer Bushner at Phi Delta Kappa, P. O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402 (phone 812-339-1156).

B. I want to keep parents informed of their child's progress.

C. I would like to frequently discuss with parents their child's progress and our educational program.

D. I want parents to be partners in education - visiting the classroom, consulting with me on the educational program, and supplementing the school's efforts.

If you circled only letter A or B go back to questions numbers 2 and 3. Perhaps you'll find you already communicate in this matter and need to read no further. If you circled either letter C or D continue with this section.

2. Check below the ways in which you want parents involved in the educational process:

_____Support at home my efforts in the classroom
_____Visit the classroom
_____Come to parent conferences
_____Become parent volunteers
_____Assist in the selection of texts
_____Assist in the development of curriculum
_____Occasionally teach my class
_____Tutor students
_____Other

As you can see, there are many ways in which parents can involve themselves in your classroom. You may not have previously thought of some of these, others you may be using. The point here is that how you communicate with parents depends on how you intend to involve them in the educational process.

Conclusion:

Start with question six and reflect upon your answers above: What is it you want parent communication to do for you (question six)? To build this type of communication, what perceptions of parents do you need to build upon or change (questions five and four)? How have you

been communicating with parents (questions three and two)? And how have those communications not served you as you would like (question 1)? With these thoughts in mind, we offer you Section II. In that section we have tried to gather a variety of tools to help you mold your parent communications to fit your needs. We offer no panaceas or quick fix solutions. Rather, page through these suggestions, choose those that fit your needs with the above questions in mind, and give them a try. Many of these are time tested by ourselves and others and have been successful in involving parents in the educational process. Some of our best ideas come from you! Please let us know how these suggestions work for you or others you have so we can include those in future editions of this guide.

Section II

Suggestions For Improved Communications

Contents

Building A Year Long Plan

Helpful Hints For Successful Parent Conferences

Communication Samples

Things To Send Home Besides Homework

The Student Notebook

Writing Communications Carefully

Other Ways To Communicate: Teacher Ideas and Comments

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A Year Long Guide To Successful Parent Communications

To build a successful communication link with parents in order to make them partners in education requires a plan.* The following academic year plan has been developed from a variety of sources and practical experience. Use it as a suggestion guide for building your own planned communications.

(*Hit or miss strategies only foster hit or miss communications. Communication, like teaching, requires careful, sequential, and complete planning.)

Phase One/Introduction

Time Frame	Activity
First Three Weeks of School	Call the homes of all students. (This may sound like a lot of work but it can be easily handled if you know what you want to say and how you want to say it. Conversations will average 5 minutes if you jot down what you want to say. Inform parents of the year's academic plans and your high expectations for their child. You may be occasionally rebuffed, but the year-long payoff of parents knowing someone "cares" will be well worth it.)
2nd Month of School	School Visits (Send out invitations to parents to visit the classroom during a particularly interesting two week period. Encourage their attendance and participation.)

Phase Two/Educational Partnership

Time Frame	Activity
After "School Visits"	Instructional Partnership (Now that parents have visited you, invite them to become involved. Ask for volunteers for tutoring, small groups, whatever.)
Third Month	Parent Teacher Conferences (See guidelines for a successful conference.)
Fourth-Eighth Month	Conferences as needed (Establish a regular sequence of either calling home or sending home notices on each student's progress. Make sure this includes positive comments.)

Phase Three/Ending The Year

Time Frame	Activity
Last Month of School	Year End Report (Nothing is less informative than a simple grade. Devise a reporting form for each student that is specific on their strengths and weaknesses and refers to these as an individual. Send these home with or in addition to your standardized report cards.)

Helpful Hints For Successful Parent Conferences

Always remember that parents are individuals having unique personalities and problems. With this thought in mind the following tips are offered:

1. Experts agree that success or failure of a parent conference depends on the teacher. The success of a conference must be judged according to the circumstances and results. A key ingredient is the behavior of the teacher.

2. A teacher seated behind a desk transmits authority. This image can be counterproductive. Try to build a cooperative, less formal relationship by greeting the parent near the room entrance and sitting away from the teacher's desk.

3. Greet the parent with warmth and friendliness. Parents easily detect false greetings when the teacher is hurried or tense. It is difficult for the parents to discuss their children's progress when the teacher behaves as if he wishes the parent hadn't come or would soon leave.

4. Listen, don't lecture. Encourage the parent to talk and then listen to what is said. Don't presume to understand the perceptions of a parent.

5. Ask questions to find out what the parent is thinking about and feeling. The teacher can better interpret the child's behavior when the parents' attitude is understood.

6. Accept, don't refute, the reasons a parent provides for a child's behavior. Lead the discussion to possible causes, realizing that behavior results from many factors.

7. If at all possible, accept what a parent suggests as a plan of action. It is better for the parent to take the initiative than for a teacher to force a plan of his own. The teacher can always suggest alternatives if the parent's plan fails.

8. Suggest alternatives for joint consideration if the parent cannot suggest reasons or plans for dealing with a child's behavior. This approach makes the parent a part of the plan and action.

9. Don't argue with a parent this only leads to resentment and resistance.

10. Don't assume a parent wants help or advice. Assumptions like this imply criticism and usually result in resistance.

11. Since most parents have difficulty being objective about their own children, do not criticize. Criticism kills cooperation.

12. Avoid providing direct advice, even if a parent asks for it. Use mutual discussion to let advice or suggestions develop. This technique will help a parent's insight into reasons for the behavior grow.

13. Try to avoid embarrassing the parent. Be aware of sensitivities and do not remark about expressions, gestures or voice since these provide references to the parents' emotions.

14. Refrain from showing approval or disapproval; accept anything a parent tells you. Doing otherwise may modify the parents' attitudes or feelings and cause them to say things they don't mean or agree with things with which they disagree.

15. Recognize problems that are beyond your control or capacity to provide sufficent help. Make referrals when necessary.

16. Try to close the conference on a positive note through encouragement, reassurance, a plan for future consultation, or a plan for cooperative action.

With these hints in mind, consider also the "Roadblocks" on the following page. And, refer to the Conference Evaluation Sheet (below) for keeping track of conference outcomes.

CONFERENCE EVALUATION SHEET

Pupil_____ **Teacher**_____
Date of Conference_____ **Length of Conference**____
Who came to the conference?_____
_____
Give a brief summary of outcome_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Route to: Unit Coordinator_____
Counselor _____

Adapted from Goldstein and DeVita. Successful School Communications. West Nyack, NY.: Parker, 1977.

Roadblocks

The following are "roadblocks" to effective communications with parents. The "roadblock" is put up when teachers do or say these things to a parent.

1. Ordering, Directing, Commanding

   "You need to work more with Susie"

2. Warning, Admonishing, Threatening

   "John will flunk if you don't make him work more"

3. Moralizing, Preaching

   "You should not let him watch T.V. so much"

4. Advising, Giving Solutions

   "Why don't you discipline him more?"

5. Lecturing, Teaching

   "Parents should visit the school more"

6. Judging, Criticizing, Blaming

   "It's your fault he didn't get an A"

7. Praising, Agreeing

   "You are a great mother"

8. Name-calling, Ridicule

   "You are a worry-wart over this issue"

9. Interpreting, Analyzing

   "You are saying that because you're angry"

10. Reassuring, Sympathizing

    "Don't worry; everything will work out"

11. Probing, Questioning

    "Why did you do that?"

12. Distracting, Diverting

    "Well, just forget about it"

Communication Samples

The following are examples of communications often sent to parents, used with students, or sent from children to their parents. All of them convey a message about school, teachers, and teaching. Please peruse them and give several a try. Some come from commercial sources, many are general ideas, and others are teacher comments or suggestions about things they have tried or interactions with parents. Obviously, some are intended for use in particular school settings or grade levels. But, more important than determining the settings or grade in which they would be used, focus on intent and process of the communication. Specifically, as you examine them refer to some of the questions raised in Section I, e.g.,

What messages are conveyed?

How is the message delivered?

Would you read this?

How would you respond or what would you think of the school or teacher if you received this?

What elements of communciation contribute to success, mediocrity, or failure?

Following are samples of items sent by the school or district which help establish school and community relations. (Taken from Goldstein and DeVito, 1977).

I heard a rumor that. . .

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please reply to: Name _____

Address _____

Place
Stamp
Here

Joseph C. DeVita, Principal
Brien McMahon High School
Norwalk, Conn. 06854

847-0481

Here's an idea to improve Brien McMahon High School. . .

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please reply to: Name _____

Address _____

I have a question about Brien McMahon High School. . .

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please reply to: Name _____

Address _____

Sample of mass produced form used by teachers to send positive messages to parents.

Happy Notes

Date_____

Dear Mr. and Mrs._____

Just a short note to let you know how pleased I am that

_____

_____

_____

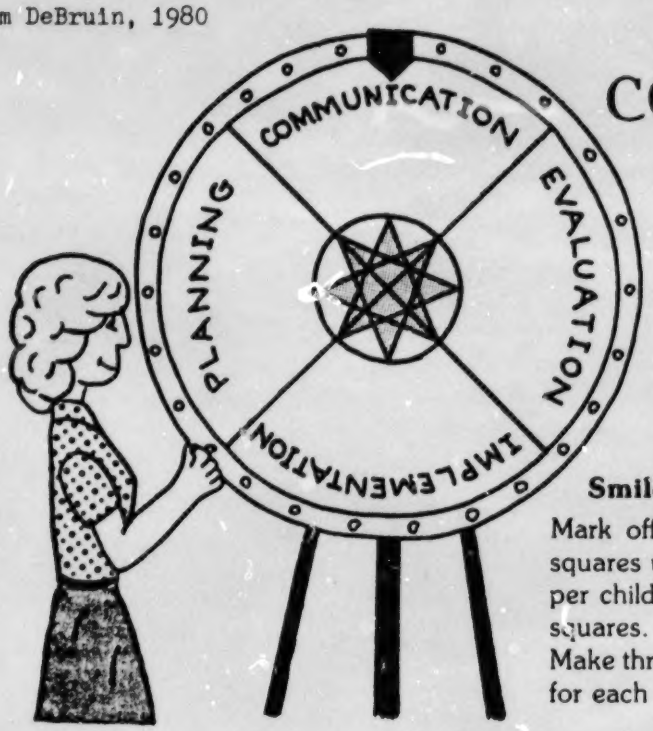
Sincerely yours,

_____

Teacher

From DeBruin, 1980

COMMUNICATION

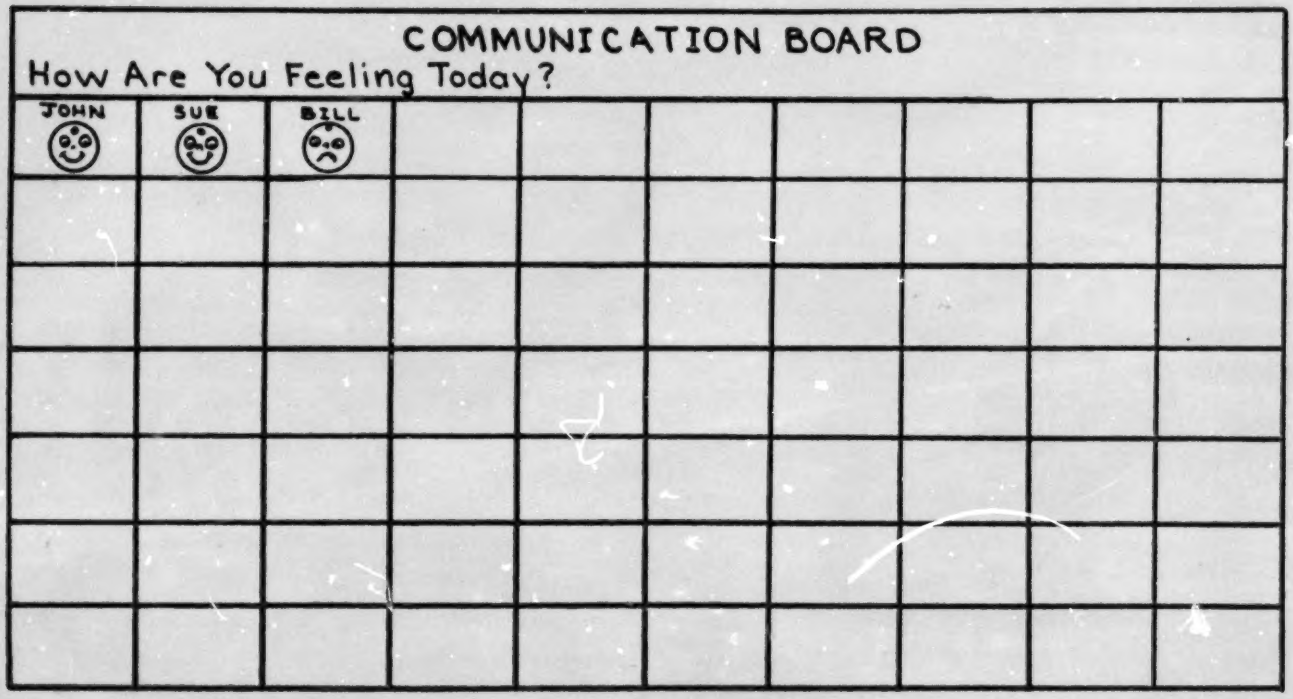


Open communication that fosters relationships based on mutual trust and respect is important in any classroom. To keep communication lines open with children, yourself and parents you may want to use a *Communication Board*, *Communication Cards* and *Posters* and develop a *Stretch-O-Gram*.

Smiley Face Communication Board

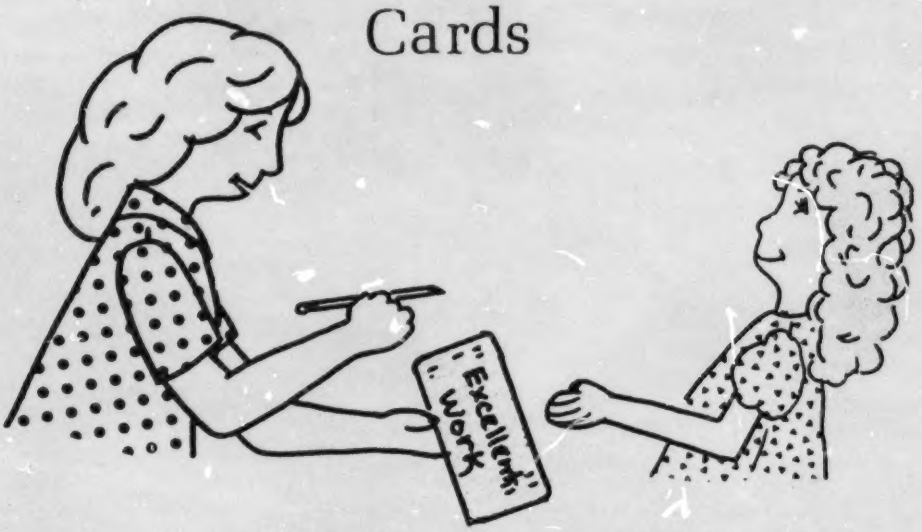
Mark off a piece of wood or triple wall into squares using magic marker. Have one square per child and one for yourself. Print names in squares. Screw cup hook into each square. Make three smiley faces out of tagboard like this for each person including yourself.

Cut out. Laminate. Punch hole in upper part of face. You and your students place the smiley face on the hook that best represents your/their feelings when arriving at school in the morning and upon dismissal at the end of the day. This will generate communication and will hopefully develop respect for the other person's feelings both in and out of school.



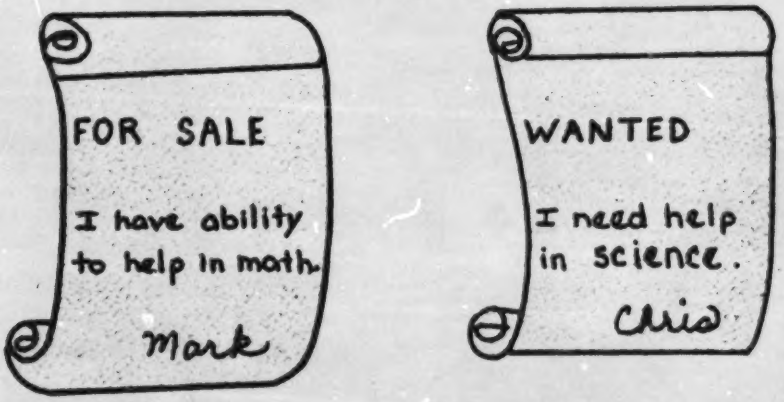
Computer cards that are laminated work well to increase communication between you and your children. Obtain some cards, then laminate. Write message on card using erasable pen. Give message to child who in turn can write message to you. Messages can be exchanged also among students and you as a result of interesting discoveries or outstanding work.

Communication Cards



Communication want ad posters can be used effectively in the classroom. Give each child a sheet of paper and have students write their name on their poster. Students then write about things "for sale" or "want ad" wanted material or help. Display posters. Add necessary features that come up. For example, a for sale ad may include, "I have ability to help in math for sale" or "I need help in science" may be a want ad for help. These make excellent support systems for the teacher and students and help all concerned to work together.

Want Ad Posters



★ From DeBruin, 1980

Use this handy "Stretch-O'-Gram" on a ditto to send home each week to parents. At the end of each day, write a few sentences with your children about that day. Check smiley face feelings. Include student sketches and artwork. Use the following page, "A Peek At Next Week" as a ditto and run on back of this sheet for a single page Stretch-O'-Gram.

Best Happening This Week **Phase of Moon** **Weekly High** **Weekly Low** **For the week of** _____

Day	Our Feelings About The Day
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	

From DeBruin, 1980

A PEEK AT NEXT WEEK

NEXT WEEK
WE WILL BE STUDYING:

REMINDERS for PARENTS:

1.

2.

3.

Write questions and comments here.

JUNK
MATERIALS WE WILI NEED:

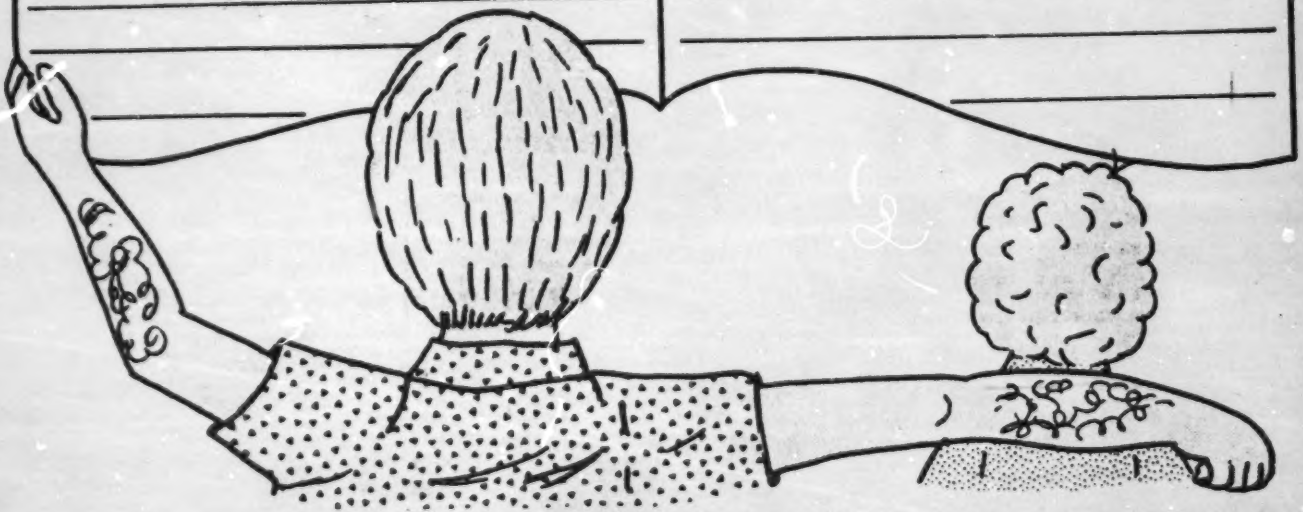
REMINDERS for PARENTS:

4.

5.

6.

Tear off and return to teacher.



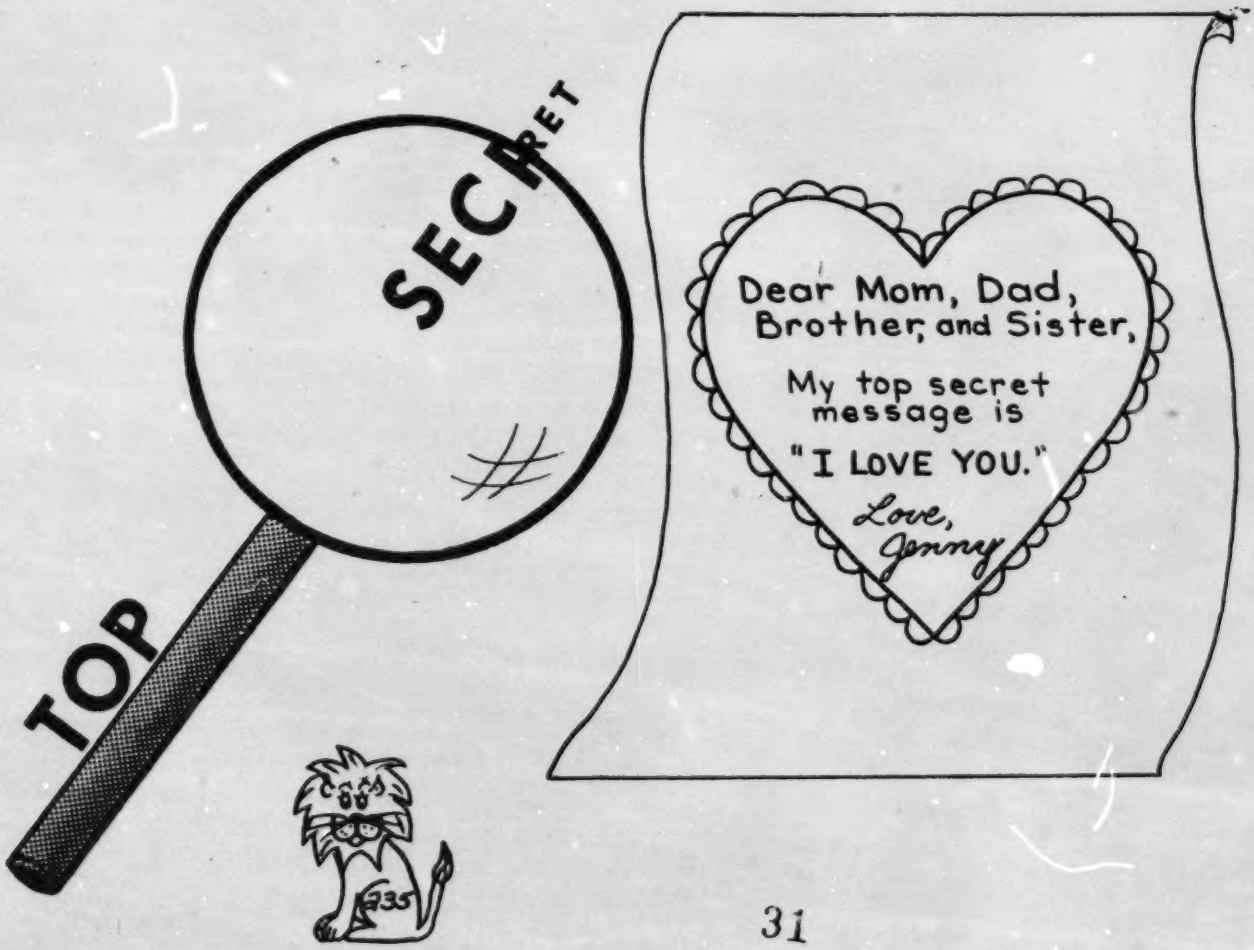
Do this Top Secret Message and staple to STRETCH-O-GRAM to help increase communication between you, kids, and their parents. Obtain some lemon juice

from a couple of lemons

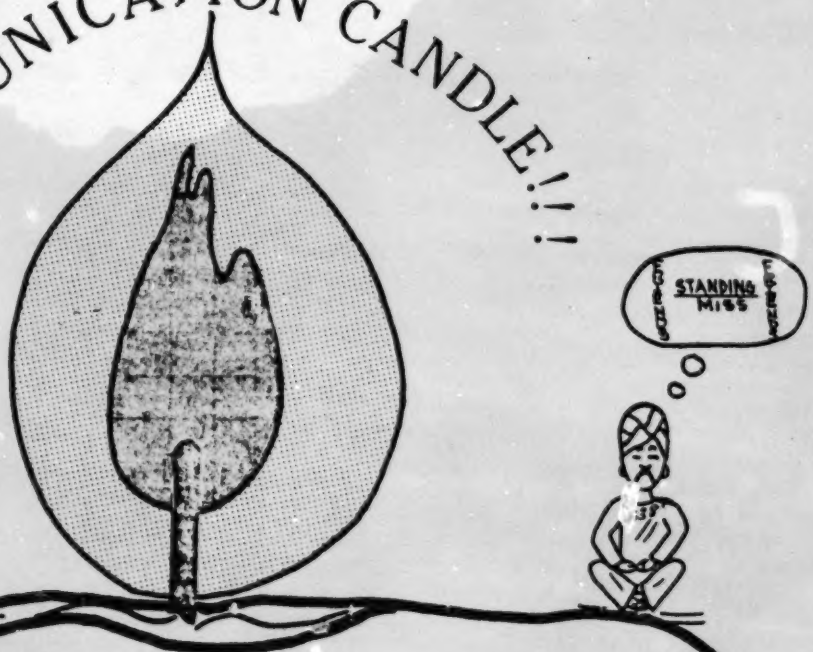
from

and these will lead you to your

of understanding SCIENTIFIC CHANGE and how change can lead to increased COMMUNICATION. You will also need a *lamp* or *flat iron*, *white paper* and some *pipe cleaners* or *Q-tips*. Have each child send a secret message to themselves, to each student, and to their parents. Using a Q-tip, draw or print messages on white paper using lemon juice. Allow to dry. Put over light bulb or iron the papers. What happens? Why? Paste a copy of this message in your science notebook. Then make another message for members of your family but do *not* place over light bulb or iron. Staple to STRETCH-O-GRAM. Take home and have family members use an iron or light bulb to decipher the top secret message from you to them. Good luck.



COMMUNICATION CANDLE!!!



After a few months into the school year and after you and your students have gotten a chance to know each other better, you may want to use COMMUNICATION CANDLE to open up communication lines even further. You will need a fairly large *candle* for each member of the group and a *match*. Have children sit comfortably in a circle. Darken room. Light your candle. Then, light first person's candle with your candle. Touch the two flames together while saying something positive to that child. For example, "Happy Birthday, Julie, I am hoping you have an enjoyable day." Eye contact under candlelight is important. (Comments from others are accepted at any time.) In turn, Julie lights candle of student next to her while saying something positive about that person. This continues until all candles are lit and all comments are given. Some children may choose not to say anything but merely light the next person's candle. That's okay too, as a great deal is said nonverbally. You may want to talk about the significance of candles and what they represent; e.g., the Torch used in the Olympics, the making of a candle, how does a candle flame burn, the hottest part of the flame, or about the "scratch the flame" test given out by the gas companies so you can smell gas in your home. Better yet, make a candle web. Continue your study even further by making candles in the classroom.

Things To Send Home Besides Homework

Parents' role in their children's education can and should extend much further than seeing that homework is done and attending teacher/parent conferences. If parents are involved and enthusiastic about their child's educational experiences, it can only enhance that experience. The following are a few suggestions for things besides homework to send home with your students. These will potentially aid you in the difficult task of communicating with parents and assisting each other in the education process.

1. Start a newsletter. You might include a "State of the Class" message; want ads (for art materials, snacks, parent volunteers, suggestions for classroom speakers); a calendar of upcoming community events such as festivals, plays, demonstrations, or open houses; "Quotable Quotes" heard by various class members; creative writing excerpts; recognize parents who have visited or contributed to the classroom; talk your school counselor into writing an advice column for parents, or let students give parents advice.
2. How often do parents pose the question "What did you do in school today?" and receive the answer "Oh, nothing." Help alleviate this by sending conversation starters. For example: This week we'll be studying plants. Ask your child about taking cuttings from plants. We'll do that Tuesday and will go on a plant-watching walk Thursday.
3. Slip parents a few hints for Christmas gifts for their family, such as some favorite books which are at an appropriate reading level, magazine subscriptions, creative toys, or "events" - a plane ride, trip to the zoo, or the "fixings" for a party.

4. Send parents a list of vocabulary words from your current unit. Explain why you are teaching this.

5. Obtain a list of age appropriate books available at the public library. Pass it on to parents, along with the hours the library is open.

6. Do the planning for some family field trips. Phone local museums, orchards, farms, places of business, or parks. Find out what they might have to offer families, if there is a fee, hours families would be welcome to stop for a tour, and other pertinent information.

7. Brochures are sometimes provided by the AFT, NEA, or book companies on topics such as promoting reading in the home, or how a parent can help with homework. Obtain enough to share with all your parents.

8. During a nutrition unit, send a break-down of nutrition information on commonly consumed 'junk' food, along with a list of recommended daily food intake for children.

9. "Clip and Saves" can include information such as the weekly menu, art materials for collectibles to send to school, or a calendar of upcoming events.

10. A simple finger puppet or two can be dittoed to be cut out at home. Include the outline of the story this character is from if the students are familiar with it, or let them make up an original tale.

11. At vacation time, send some wishes for a pleasant vacation along with possible activities to occupy the extra hours.

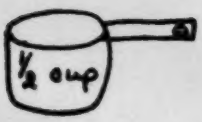
The following pages are examples of non-homework send-homes. Adapt to the age level and interests of your class.

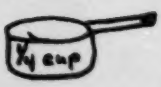
Directions for many activities can be drawn pictorially, with a minimum number of words. Use a poster-size chart at school, and send home a miniature to be followed by parent and child.

BAKED APPLES

6

1 stick





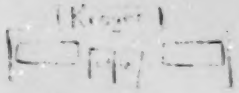
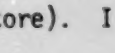
red hots

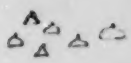
1

Cut apples into quarters to remove stems and seeds, or core apples and leave whole. Place in baking dish. Cut butter into chunks and place on apples. Sprinkle sugar, red hots, and cinnamon over all. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes. During baking, you may spoon sauce over apples.

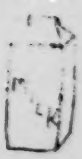
"Story starters" are commonly used in the classroom: couldn't they also be used at home just for fun? Suggest to parents they start a collection of this creative writing, created by them and their children. Most likely, the children will be enthused about reading and re-reading their own stories. This can be geared for non-readers up to very good readers and writers.

Here are some "story starters" for you parents and kids to write your own stories. You don't have to be a good artist--your child will be able to identify simple pictures, especially if you let him/her think of what you should draw. Here are some pictures to get you started and give you ideas. The important thing is to let your child help make up the story and "read" it back to you by filling in the picture-words.

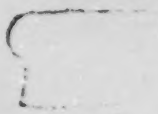
One day I went to the  (grocery store). I bought  (eggs)

and  (chocolate chips) to bake some (cookies).

bananas



money


bread

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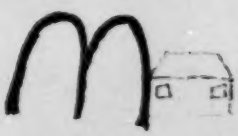
went to  (McDonald's). told the (waitress) he wanted a and a . Then he jumped on his

(bicycle) and rode off to.....

slide

swimming pool

wagon

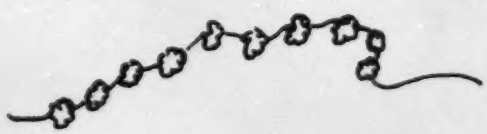
Dear Parents,

As it gets colder, your children may be inside more. Also affected by the change in the weather are the birds. Here are directions for something to occupy all of you--the birds, the kids, and a little help from you.

Smear peanut butter on a pine cone. Then roll it in bird seed. Do this several times to build up lots of seeds. Tie on a string and hang it in a tree or from a fence or porch--preferably near a window. Then just keep an eye out for the birds.

Make a bird feeder from a gallon-size plastic milk jug or an economy-size bleach bottle. Cut out two sides so the birds can fly through. Weight the jug with coarse pebbles and fill it with birdseed. Wire it securely to a tree limb.

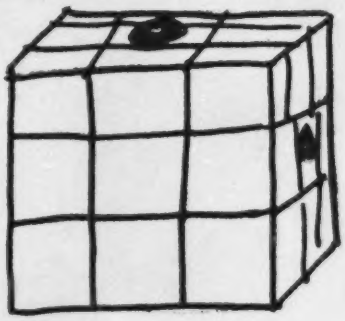
Make a Christmas tree for the birds. A bare bush or evergreen tree will be fine for hanging food decorations. String Cheerios, cranberries, or popcorn on laces, heavy thread, or yarn, and hang it out.



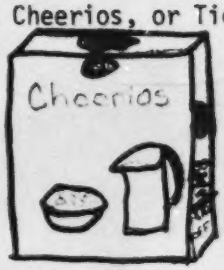
HALLOWEEN COSTUMES

The $2.39 plastic costumes in Murphy's may look wonderful to your child, but consider this alternative..... Find a good-sized, sturdy box add a few holes, some paper, paint, foil, and one child, plus some ingenuity, and become.....

.....a Rubik's cube

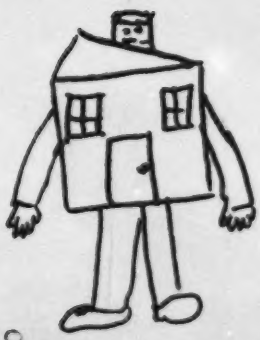


.....a box of Jello, Cheerios, or Tide



.....a generic child

.....a house, with a chimney mask



.....OR ??????

SHOW ME THAT I'M IMPORTANT
DAY OF THE WEEK CARDS!
(To develop a positive self concept)
From Lynn Grimes

Cut out the following cards. Each day place a card in a prominant place to jar your memory to express your love for your child.

SUNDAY.....

TELL ME HOW MUCH YOU LOVE ME.

THURSDAY.....

TELL SOMEBODY HOW GREAT I AM (SO I CAN OVERHEAR).

MONDAY.....

TELL ME SOME THINGS I DO VERY WELL.

FRIDAY.....

SHOW ME WHY I'M SPECIAL TO YOU.

TUESDAY.....

ENCOURAGE ME TO TRY TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW. GIVE ME LOTS OF PRAISE FOR TRYING.

SATURDAY.....

TELL ME SOMETHING THAT YOU ARE PROUD OF THAT I CAN DO.

WEDNESDAY.....

GIVE ME A BIG HUG JUST BECAUSE I'M ME.

ANY OLD DAY.....

TELL ME WHY YOU'RE GLAD I AM PART OF YOUR FAMILY!

Love letters out loud

You can never say "I love you" too many times. Young children soak up love, storing reserves of it for insecure moments. Every day you can say these things; someday perhaps you'll hear some of them said back to you.

WE ALL NEED TO OVERHEAR A LITTLE BRAGGING ABOUT OURSELVES.

IF A CHILD LIVES WITH LOVE, HE LEARNS TO ACCEPT HIMSELF.

A CHILD GLOWS WHEN HIS UNIQUENESS IS APPRECIATED.

A CHILD NEEDS REASSURANCE THAT HE IS LEARNING....GROWING.

A CHILD NEEDS TO FEEL YOUR PRIDE IN HIS PROGRESS.

SOME TASKS ARE SO DIFFICULT FOR A CHILD TO LEARN. A CHILD MAY NEED EXTRA ENCOURAGMENT TO KEEP TRYING.

ACCEPTANCE AND APPRECIATION OF YOUR CHILD IS ONE OF THE GREATEST GIFTS YOU CAN GIVE.

A CHILD NEEDS TO FEEL THAT HE FITS INTO THE SCENE OF YOUR LIFE.

LOVE CERTIFICATES FOR VALENTINE'S DAY!!

COUPONS TO ENRICH YOUR CHILD'S LIFE

Cut out these coupons to give to your child to redeem from you.

TURN IN FOR 10 KISSES

A COUPON FOR A WALK AROUND THE BLOCK

GOOD FOR 10 MINUTES OF STAR GAZING

REDEEM FOR FIVE HUGS AND ONE

T E
I L
CK

TRADE IN FOR A VISIT TO THE PARK.

TURN IN FOR READING OF FAVORITE BOOK.

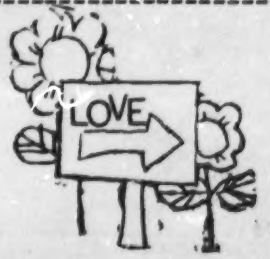
REDEEM FOR ONE BEDTIME STORY

GOOD FOR INVITING ONE FRIEND OVER.

A COUPON FOR AN EXTRA GOOD NIGHT KISS AND HUG.

TURN IN FOR PLAYING ONE GAME

AN ADDED BONUS LOTS OF



LOVE,

, AND MORE LOVE!

The Student Notebook

An effective method for written communication is a plastic three-ring substantial paper notebook for each child. This notebook's purpose is not to transport homework or completed school papers necessarily, but to form a communication link between school and home. Your student carries the notebook to school every morning where it is checked for messages by the teacher, set aside until departure time, and carried home where it is checked and emptied every evening by the parents. Suggestions for its contents follow:

Any message between parent, teacher, or other school personnel. Both 'mass mailings' and individual notes are useful.

Bi-weekly or monthly newsletters

Calendars.

Artwork.

Important items of the child's choosing. The note passed to him/her or the leaf found on the playground will be far more valued than the tenth handwriting ditto, and it's as important to have communication between parent and child as it is between parent and teacher.

Requests for snack food, art materials, etc.

Hints for success

Be careful not to get into the "junk mail" syndrome. Go for quality, not quantity, or you'll risk being ignored altogether.

Answer notes or requests from parents promptly, either by phone or in writing.

Keep a list of student's namer handy and jot the date beside the name when a personal note is sent to that home. Try to send a personal note to each family every month. Don't overlook those non-descript students who tend to be overlooked.

Keep a three-hole punch available in the room for the students to use at their discretion for their own important items. After all, it is their notebook and their school experience about which we're trying to communicate.

Also supply pre-punched scrap papers (possibly the backs of unused or faded dittos) for the students to write their own notes home in their extra minutes. Of course, they're going to get to talk to their parents, but notes are fun and writing is one of the skills we're attempting to teach, right?

If the notebook is not being emptied at home, make a quick phone call and see what's up. It's quite possible that the child arrives home before either parent and the notebook is long forgotten when they do arrive.

Writing Communications Carefully

Few things are more embarrassing or cast a low level of education than mistakes in your messages to parents. Brief handwritten notes, formally prepared invitations, or district annual reports are not immune to the disease of misspelled words, and poor or improper use of rules of English. Usually all of these are attributed to haste and carelessness. Take the time to proofread your work and use a dictionary. Use the following as a brief guide for rules of English.

Rules of English For Writers

1. Don't use no double negatives.
2. Make each pronoun agree with their antecedent.
3. Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
4. About them sentence fragments.
5. When dangling, watch them participles.
6. Verbs has to agree with their subject.
7. Just between you and I, case is important, too.
8. Don't write run-on sentences they are hard to read.
9. Don't use commas, which are not necessary.
10. Try to not ever split infinitives.
11. Its important to use your apostrophe's correctly.
12. Proofread your writing to see if you any words out.
13. Finally, ask another person to proofread your communcations.

Other Ways to Communicate - Innovative Ideas

Generation Appreciation Day - designate a specific school day for parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, to visit the classroom; send a schedule of daily activities to the parents so they can notify family members and plan ahead of time when they would want to visit.

Happy Gram - send positive notes home on a half-sheet pre-printed form, like a telegram; give them to only a few students on any particular day. (Share the message with the student - that will guarantee it gets home.)

Telephone Sunshine Call - at the very beginning of the school year call each parent for a brief period to introduce yourself and tell them about the upcoming year.

Parent Recognition Certificate - give these to parents who help in the classroom to show your appreciation.

Monthly Open Letter to Parents - describe objectives for each study unit and how parents can supplement at home.

6 Week Mini-Course for Parents - describe objectives for each study unit and how parents can supplement at home.

Monthly Calendar for Parents - suggesting simple activities to do with their children at home as well as classroom activities for the month.

Cards or Notes sent in the mail - for a student's birthday, when a student is sick for an extended period of time, or when there is a death in the family.

Letter sent home with student on first day of school - including a welcome; a summary of what will be studied; an invitation to visit; a list of materials that the student will need; a phone number where the teacher can be reached.

Samples of work sent home with report cards.

A Daily or Weekly report card system.

The Following Are Ideas Given To Us By Teachers

I hold room meetings the first month of school to explain program goals, and my desire for open and honest communication between myself, the child, and the family.

I use pictures or slides showing the class at work and play.

I have students write progress notes, evaluative, or summative letters to parents.

My school holds a Class Night. One evening each year we invite parents to visit their children's classrooms and see sample lessons, short lessons with student participation, and an enactment of the school day. It's great for working parents who can't come during the day.

Selected Comments

"The children who need this parental communication most are the parents who don't show up for conferences. All parents like to hear good things about their children so maybe we should stress the positive at least in the early years. This may hook otherwise reluctant parents and when uncomplimentary communication is necessary they will be around to hear and willing to cooperate. However, we must not paint a picture of the child which is not an honest one. This will really put the following teachers on the spot and cause communication to break off with the parents now blaming the new teacher for the child's behavior."

"Always start on a positive note. When upset, wait to call - calm down and be ready to discuss rationally and objectively. Remember to see the situation from both sides."

"I've learned to listen before I talk - sometimes, a conference is almost a therapy session for parents/guardian(s)."

"I give the parent a chance to do most of the talking in behavior cases guided by me by asking (A) Have you seen him do this in the past? (B) What do you feel can be done to alleviate or modify this behavior? If the parent brings out something that works - fine - if not, he/she is more amenable to "listening" to me and becoming involved in my suggestions."

"Before communicating with parents, be sure you have legitimate grounds for contacting the parents - in that some contact for negative purposes should be avoided when they lack substance."

"Parent co-operation and communication is extremely valuable if the parent feels the teacher is genuinely interested in the parents' help and is not too busy for the problems of just one student. Frequent and regular (and early) contact with the parent by the teacher will produce the best relationship."

"I try to make positive contacts concerning the student whenever possible, so the parents won't always feel there's something wrong just because a teacher contacts them."

"I'm not sure if you would call it innovative, but more common sense than anything else. In a parent-teacher conference I usually allow enough time for parent/or student to respond as well as offer suggestions to problem(s) at hand. It also helps to be organized and prepared to discuss with documental facts at hand, i.e., examples of child's work in area in which he's having problems, or daily notes with times listed in which child talked without permission or disturbed others while they were working. The above helps establish a rapport and the lines of communication seem to be more open as school progresses.

Communication Systems Ideas

"Phone each parent first week of school and establish communication and trust."

"This is not particularly innovative, but for IEP's all but one parent came. 1. I call and establish a time the parent can come with this approach - "I know you are busy but..." etc. 2. A letter is sent confirming date. 3. People are called the day before as a reminder (only ones I feel will forget - since I know my parents I can predict this.)

Other Ideas

"I think if we let parents know what we're doing throughout the year or our plans for the year and tell them right up front, there are less problems."

1) It is usually useful to ask for their "help."
2) I like to have something positive to say about the pupil also.
3) I give very specific situations or suggestions whenever possible and try to be brief."

"Use common sense. Treat parents with respect. Make them feel comfortable. Ask their opinions. Let them make suggestions. Use a pleasant setting - flowers, etc."

"It's not exactly innovating, but it is important always to show both the positive and negative work/behavior of the student. And always be truthful, even if it hurts a little."

1) State to parent you are concerned and care about student as individual.
2) State basic requirements (behavior, academic performance)
3) Explain how student is not meeting requirements
4) Enlist parent's help and/or suggestions for eliminating problem

Let the parent do most of the talking.
Provide answers when needed.
Give suggestions when you are sure they want it.

1) Before the problem gets out of hand, contact the parent to make them cognizant of the area of concern.
2) Be honest with the parent, do not sugarcoat or over emphasize the problem.
3) Talk to...not at the parent.

"Since my course is an elective I usually begin by thanking parent for encouraging his student to participate - takes the "edge" off general introduction."

"Ask directly and immediately if they know of any specific problems that should be discussed. When they have had their say, fair play makes them listen to what the teacher has to say about a lot of interruptions and complaints."

"Keep trying and trying, even though the phone is busy, disconnected, wrong number, wrong address or any of the other things that always seem to come up. Perseverance is the key to getting meaningful results from parents."

"Most parents I have to contact are indifferent or hostile. My "innovation is brevity and "detachment" - some Will Roy stuff to "defuse" the situation."

"I feel very strongly that positive communication, whether directly with a student or via phone with parents or guardians, is very good. There is something good in everybody and it is much easier to build interpersonal relationships using goodness and fairness. When a healthy relationship is established a more successful learning atmosphere is developed along with a healthy self respect and respect for the teacher/administrator."

"Be honest, have concrete data to share to back up statements. Be positive about the child - even children's problems can be seen in the total context of other positive personal characteristics."

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Section III

Communicate With Us

We hope that some of these ideas prove useful to you. As we mentioned earlier, many of our best ideas come from teachers like yourselves. So after you try some of these out we would like to hear from you. On the next page you will find a form to share your successes and recommendations. Please take some time to fill it out and send it to us - we would enjoy sharing your experiences with others.

Dear Ralph and George,

Here are some ideas on parent communication I would like to share with you.

1. I tried the following items from your "Improving Parent Communications: A Handbook: and these were the results:

Item Tried	Results : Comments

2. These are some ideas that I use myself:

3. Other comments:

You may use my ideas_____

You may use my name and school_____

You may not use my ideas_____

You may not use my name_____

Sincerely,

_____
Name

_____
School

_____
Grade and/or subject